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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 RIYADH 000638

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SUBJECT: 19TH ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT: CLOSING SESSION

REF: A. RIYADH 0636
[1](#)B. RIYADH 0551

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The closing session of the 19th Arab League Summit in Riyadh on March 29 issued the "Riyadh Declaration," which calls for the implementation of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, demands the removal of weapons of mass destruction from the region, and supports the development of nuclear programs for peaceful purposes by states in the region. Additional resolutions included condemnation of Israeli "aggression" against Lebanon, support for the reconstruction of Lebanon, support for African Union efforts in Darfur and Somalia, and the decision to hold an extraordinary ministerial conference on regional efforts regarding the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction. The Lebanon resolution "welcomed" the Siniora government's seven-point plan and voiced support for a planned international tribunal to investigate former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri's assassination. In a press conference following the Summit, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal again described the Coalition presence in Iraq as an occupation because it was a "military action that was not in response to an invitation by Iraq." The heads of each of the 21 Arab League member states attending the Summit made closing statements, most of which echoed what was said in the opening session (ref A). Syrian President Bashar al-Assad announced that the 20th Arab League summit would be held in Damascus and voiced the hope that it would be "another quantum leap in the march of common Arab action." END SUMMARY.

Riyadh Declaration

[1](#)2. (C) The March 29 closing session of the 19th Arab League Summit in Riyadh featured the Riyadh Declaration, which was read by Arab League Secretary General (SYG) Amr Mousa. In a clear reference to Iran's bid to achieve nuclear weapons capability, as well as Israeli Prime Minister Olmert's statements in December 2006 implying that Israel possesses

nuclear weapons, the Declaration states that the region should be free of all weapons of mass destruction and that there should be no "double-standard" regarding the possession of such weapons. The Declaration also warns against the "new dangerous and destructive race" to acquire nuclear weapons, while affirming the right for countries to pursue nuclear energy programs for peaceful purposes, but in accordance with international terms -- to include inspection and monitoring.

13. (C) The Declaration articulates support for the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, calling it the "right path for a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict." In addition to giving "top priority" to educational development in the Arab world, the Declaration noted the need to support efforts to enhance human and women's rights. The Declaration also emphasizes the need to "promote a culture of moderation, tolerance, dialogue, and openness, and reject all forms of "terrorism, fanaticism, and extremism." Syrian President Bashar al-Assad announced that the 20th Arab League Summit would be held in Damascus and voiced the hope that it would be "another quantum leap in the march of common Arab action."

Palestinian Conflict

14. (C) The Summit produced the unanimous agreement on the Arab peace plan that had been the Saudi government's strategic aim for the meeting. Closing statements and Summit decisions closely echoed the opening statements (ref A), reiterating support for the Arab Peace Initiative as approved by the Beirut Summit in 2002. The Summit voiced "complete support" for the Makkah Agreement that resulted in the

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establishment of the Palestinian National Unity Government, and called on all Arab countries to support this government. Comoran President Ahmad Sambi claimed that the Palestinian people are the victims of foreign greed, and Jordanian King Abdullah II called on Israel to work "constructively and seriously" to show its commitment to the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. While acknowledging that the Peace Initiative is a challenge for the international community, particularly the U.S., King Abdullah II praised the U.S.' efforts at reviving the peace process. He called on Palestinian leaders to unite to establish an independent Palestinian state in accordance with the Peace Initiative.

15. (C) Lebanese President Emile Lahoud denounced "Israel's deceptive attempts" to amend the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative by demanding abrogation of the right for Palestinian refugees to return to their original homes. Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal said that if Israel resolves its problems with the "countries it is occupying," then the Arab world will make peace with it. Al-Faisal warned that if Israel does not respond to the Arab Peace Initiative, then Israel will not only put the region at risk, but also itself. Mousa said that the Israeli reply to the Peace Initiative is that it only wants normalization, but is not willing to give anything in return. He added that the Arab League has given USD 450 million, as well as other medical and food items, to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people because of the financial blockade.

Lebanon

16. (C) In conjunction with the Summit, the Arab League issued a resolution reiterating "full Arab solidarity" with Lebanon and voicing political and economic support for the Lebanese people. The Summit held Israel responsible for the "aggression" against Lebanon, emphasized the need for a "firm and lasting" cease-fire, and said Israel needs to compensate Lebanese citizens for "tragic direct and indirect" losses. Welcoming the Siniora government's seven-point plan, the

Summit asserted Lebanon's "right to control its water territories in accordance with international law and in opposition to Israeli ambitions." The Summit also adopted a plan for Lebanon's reconstruction and voiced support for a planned international tribunal to investigate former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri's assassination. Lebanese President Emile Lahoud thanked Arab countries for their support during and after the 2006 war with Israel. He said that Lebanon wants the international tribunal that is investigating Hariri's assassination to be fair and free from "politicization, intimidation, and blackmail."

17. (C) The two dueling Lebanese delegations undermined the many calls for reconciliation and dialogue. Lebanese President Emile Lahoud brought former Foreign Minister Fawzi Sallukh to the summit, while Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora brought current Foreign Minister Tariq Mitri. Lahoud reportedly explained to UN SYG Ban that the Siniora government is "illegitimate and unconstitutional," and the Saudi press reported that Lahoud also succeeded in getting the Arab League to "welcome," rather than "adopt," Siniora's seven-point plan for Lebanon.

Iraq

18. (C) The Summit stressed the need for a political and security solution to Iraq, stressing that the will of the Iraqi people in deciding their own political future must be respected and condemning all acts of terrorism. During a joint Mousa-Saud Al-Faisal press conference after the Summit concluded, Al-Faisal responded to a question about King Abdullah's earlier statement that the U.S. presence in Iraq is "an occupation" and the USG's denial of this characterization. Al-Faisal stated that it is an occupation because it is a military action that was not in response to an invitation by Iraq. Kuwaiti Amir Shaykh Amir Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah condemned terrorist acts in Iraq, and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak called for the prevention of

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a further split between Iraq's Shi'a and Sunnis.

Iran

19. (C) As in opening statements, closing statements and Summit resolutions contained surprisingly little discussion of or reference to Iran, its interference in the domestic affairs of countries in the region, or its efforts to obtain nuclear weapons capability. However, the Summit did condemn Iran's "occupation" of the Tumb and Abu Musa islands. Additionally, acknowledging the increasing tension related to Iran's nuclear program following the recent imposition of stricter UNSCR 1747 sanctions, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak called for prevention of a serious confrontation between Iran and the West.

Sudan/Somalia

110. (C) The Summit supported Arab League cooperation with the African and European Unions on Darfur, calling on those who defaulted on their commitment to support African Union (AU) forces to fulfill that obligation. The Arab League also voiced support for the dispatch of AU troops to Somalia, calling on members to extend assistance to the Somali government.

Nuclear Power

¶11. (C) The Summit announced that the Arab League would convene an extraordinary ministerial meeting to evaluate regional efforts relating to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, the Summit called on members to expand the use of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. Jordanian King Abdullah II called for establishment of an Arab center for the peaceful use of nuclear energy, saying that Jordan will continue to demand that Israel become a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and allow international inspection of its nuclear reactors. Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Salih called on Arab countries to cooperate in the use of nuclear power for peaceful purposes. Kuwaiti Amir Shaykh Amir Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah supported the right of nations to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes within the provisions of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said that the international community must deal with the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons issue fairly and rid the Middle East of nuclear weapons.

Arab League Items

¶12. (C) Comoran President Ahmad Sambi called on Arab countries to relinquish part of their sovereignty for the sake of Arab unity and warned that major powers are pushing the region toward chaos. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak reiterated his call for the Arab League to hold issue-specific mini-summits in addition to the annual summits -- especially pertaining to economic development.

Human development

¶13. (C) Comoran President Ahmad Sambi blamed outside factors for poverty in the Arab world. Kuwaiti Amir Shaykh Amir Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah called for Arab unity in facing economic challenges. President of the 61st Session of the UNGA Sheikhha Haya bin Rashid Al-Khalifa (Bahrain) was reportedly the first woman to ever address the Arab League, a precedent that drew praise in the media outside the KSA and less public acclaim inside the KSA or by the Saudi government. Some sources credited King Abdullah for not only showcasing Sheikhha Al-Khalifa, but also ensuring that the Riyadh Declaration called for making education a top priority

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which "consolidates . . . the positive and effective participation of women."

On the Margins

¶14. (C) Arab League members and guests held numerous meetings on the margins of the Summit. Reportedly, the most active was Lebanese President Emile Lahoud in an effort to elicit support for his positions, as well as to sideline Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora. Lahoud met with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al-Mu'alim, Jordanian King Abdullah II, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Malaysian Prime Minister and current OIC Chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Kuwaiti Amir Shaykh Amir Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, Yemeni President Ali Abdallah Salih, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal, Saudi Ambassador to Lebanon Abdul Aziz Khujah, Arab League SYG Amr Mousa, Algerian President Abdulaziz Bouteflika, Qatari Emir Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifah Al-Thani, UAE President Shaykh Khalifah bin Zayid Al-Nuhayyan, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, and UN SYG Ban Ki-Moon.

¶15. (C) Other meetings included Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki's discussions with OIC SYG Ekmeleddin

Ihsanoglu to urge the OIC to play a more active role in strengthening and developing relations among Islamic countries, and Saudi King Abdullah's meeting regarding Darfur. This meeting included Sudanese President Omar Al-Beshir, former Malian President and current head of the African Union's commission Alpha Oumar Konare, UN SYG Ban Ki-Moon, and Mousa. Saudi Foreign Minister Al-Faisal also chaired a meeting to discuss issues relating to Somalia.

¶16. (C) During the joint Mousa-Al-Faisal press conference, in which they said that the Arab League will publish all of its decisions, Al-Faisal pointedly refused to comment on Libyan President Gaddafi's remarks about the Summit. Al-Faisal noted only that the Saudi government does not have any "problems" with Libya, but that it seems "Libya has a problem with itself."

Atmospherics

¶17. (C) Security was tight and the Summit went smoothly for the most part. Many of Riyadh's roads were closed, as were businesses and schools, and the Diplomatic Quarter, which houses most of the foreign missions accredited to the Kingdom, was virtually "locked down." However, there were some logistical and organizational problems. Observers, including ambassadors, were required to travel to the Summit on shuttles that did not always run on time. Late during the evening of March 28, a decision was made to convene the Summit's closing session earlier than previously scheduled. Foreign missions to the Kingdom were not all notified, so several observation missions were unable to attend.

COMMENT

¶18. (S) The Riyadh Summit marked a new stage in Saudi Arabia's efforts to play a greater leadership role on regional political and security issues. It seems that Riyadh has achieved its aim of engineering unanimous Arab League support for the revival of its 2002 peace plan. By publicly describing the U.S. presence in Iraq as an illegal foreign occupation, the Saudi government has sharply separated itself from the U.S. on this crucial regional security issue. The summit resolutions demonstrated very clearly that the acquisition of nuclear technology by the region's Sunni Arab states is now a major issue, not a minor footnote to regional politics. There seems to be little doubt that this dangerous new trend is largely a reaction to Iran's aggressive nuclear program. The very public manner in which key Arab leaders were received and honored by the Saudis -- as well as non-Arab leaders such as Pakistani President Musharraf and

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Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan, whose countries share borders with Iran -- was also of great symbolic significance as a reflection of Riyadh's ambition to contest with Tehran for regional superpower status. END COMMENT.
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